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WASHINGTON, DC - U.S. Rep. Charlie Melancon held a Hurricane Recovery Policy Forum in New Orleans today to bring Members of Congress face to face with local experts and leaders. Following a luncheon with coastal parish presidents, the roughly 25 Congressmen and women met privately with Louisiana leaders with expertise in the areas of levees and coastal restoration, health care, education, small business and economic recovery, agriculture and fisheries, transportation, and housing (see list below).

In small discussion groups, the experts told Members what the situation is on the ground and worked together to develop specific courses of action Congress can take to ease the recovery. The Members will discuss the results of their meetings at a press conference tomorrow at 11:30 at the New Orleans Media Center, located at the Sheraton Hotel on Canal Street. The press conference will also be aired on CSPAN.

The policy forum was part of a four-day trip Melancon is leading to Louisiana and Mississippi to honor the one-year anniversaries of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

"When I first started talking with my colleagues in Congress about coming down to Louisiana, I knew I wanted this to be a different kind of trip," said Melancon. "I wanted them to meet directly with the people in Louisiana who are working every day to rebuild our schools, our homes, our health care system, our levees, and our state. Today we accomplished that goal. Not only did we open a lot of eyes, but we developed legislative goals that will help Louisiana cut the red tape and finally get the assistance it needs to recover and rebuild."

"Congressman Melancon knew what to do with twenty five members of Congress after he got them down here," said Rep. James E Clyburn, Chairman of the Democratic Caucus. "He put us to work. It was a rare opportunity for that many federal officials to be paired with local leaders in a room, to share ideas and work toward solutions for the critical issues of this region."

Charlotte Randolph, President of Lafourche Parish and also President of Parishes Against Coastal Erosion, took part in the levees and coastal restoration discussion group. Following the forum, Randolph commented, "I am thrilled Rep. Melancon is bringing national attention to this issue that is vital to the survival of coastal Louisiana. During the breakout group, I had the chance to talk to Rep. Neil Abercrombie, who has worked closely with Rep. Melancon to get outercontinental shelf revenue-sharing for Louisiana. Now that Mr. Abercrombie and other Members of Congress from around the country have been here, we have more allies in Washington who understand how crucial saving our coast is."

After participating in the health care discussion group, John Matessino, President and CEO of the Louisiana Hospital Association, said, "I am impressed by the dedication shown by these Members of Congress, who traveled on their own dime to Louisiana to learn about the post-hurricane health care crisis we are dealing with. We had a productive conversation with Rep. Steny Hoyer, the House Democratic Whip and second-ranking Democrat in the House. I feel the Members now understand that affordable, accessible health care is a key component to Louisiana's recovery from last year's devastating hurricanes."

John Luther, President of the Homebuilders Association of Greater New Orleans, made the following comments: "We have an enormous undertaking ahead of us in Louisiana. In St. Bernard Parish, almost every single family suffered damage to their homes and most people still can't move back. Today was a great chance to tell our story to the Members and I am confident they will share what they learned with their colleagues back in Washington."

Participating in the policy forum were leaders from the following Louisiana organizations:

Agriculture and Fisheries

Coastal Conservation Association in Louisiana
United Commercial Fisherman's Association
Louisiana Shrimp Association
Gulf Coast Commercial Fishermen's Coalition
Department of Agriculture - Commissioner Bob Odom
LA Department of Wildlife and Fisheries - Assistant Secretary John Roussel
Louisiana Oyster Task Force
Louisiana Rice Growers Association
American Sugar Cane League
Louisiana Cattlemen

Citrus Producers
Louisiana Farm Bureau
Louisiana Cattlemen
Louisiana Crawfish Research Promotion Board

Education

Tulane University
Louisiana School Boards Association
Louisiana Board of Elementary & Secondary Education
Louisiana Federation of Teachers
Louisiana Department of Education -- Deputy Superintendent of Education Carole Wallin
Louisiana Board of Regents
St. Bernard Unified School
MQVN Community Development Corporation

Health Care

Louisiana Hospital Association
West Jefferson Medical Center
Ochsner Hospital
LSU Health Science Center
Louisiana Public Health Institute
Louisiana Secretary of Health and Hospitals Dr. Fred Cerise
Louisiana Primary Care Association
Louisiana Recovery Authority

Housing

Office of the Mayor of New Orleans
Homebuilders Assn of Greater New Orleans
Housing and Urban Development field director
Fannie Mae
Freddie Mac
ACORN New Orleans
Louisiana Recovery Authority
MQVN Community Development Corporation

Levees and Coastal Restoration

Louisiana Governor's Office
South Lafourche Levee District

Louisiana Department of Natural Resources
Governor's Advisory Commission on Coastal Restoration and Conservation
America's Wetlands
Louisiana Levee Board Association
Parishes Against Coastal Erosion
Loyola University coastal restoration expert
Terrebonne Levee and Conservation District
Louisiana Recovery Authority

Small Business and Economic Recovery

Louisiana Department of Economic Development
Louisiana Recovery Authority
Louisiana AFL-CIO
MQVN Community Development Corporation

Transportation

Port Association of Louisiana
Louisiana 1 Coalition
Department of Transportation and Development
Louis Armstrong International Airport
Lake Charles Regional Airport
Lakefront Airport
Louisiana Dept. of Transportation and Development
Louisiana Recovery Authority
Louisiana Offshore Oil Port (LOOP)

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